

A

VALEDICTORY SERMON,

ON LEAVING THE OLD MEETING HOUSE  
*IN BROOKLINE,*

8 JUNE, 1806;

AND A

DEDICATORY SERMON,

ON ENTERING THE NEW HOUSE OF WORSHIP,

11 JUNE, 1806.

---

---

BY JOHN PIERCE, A. M.

MINISTER OF BROOKLINE.

---

---

THE FASHION OF THIS WORLD PASSETH AWAY.

*THE APOSTLE PAUL.*

---

---

CAMBRIDGE,

WILLIAM HILLIARD, PRINTER.

.....

1806.

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2016

ON REGARD TO HOUSES OF PUBLICK WORSHIP.



A

## VALEDICTORY SERMON.



PSALM XXVI. 8.

*LORD, I HAVE LOVED THE HABITATION OF THY HOUSE, AND THE  
PLACE, WHERE THINE HONOUR DWELLETH.*

**I**T is conjectured, that David wrote this psalm, when an exile among the Philistines through the persecutions of Saul. But, wherever situated, it appears, that he was at a distance from the tabernacle, and that he still retained an ardent affection for this place of divine worship.

From accusations, which had been alleged against him, he appeals to God with conscious rectitude. As proofs of his integrity, he asserts his trust in the Almighty, his sacred regard to truth, his abstinence from wicked companions and their evil courses, the manner, in which he had worshipped Jehovah, and the love he had entertained for his holy sanctuary. “Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place, where thine honour dwelleth.” From this passage we may therefore deduce

the respect, which saints always feel for houses of publick worship.

They do not however regard them, as the ultimate objects of affection. This would evince a superstitious disposition, highly unworthy the friends of rational piety.

By the association of ideas we may entertain a kind of reverence for buildings devoted to solemn worship and praise. This reverence, if not carried too far, may subserve important purposes. But it should have ultimate respect to him, who “dwell-eth not in temples made with hands.”

The regard, which saints feel for houses of publick worship, is not on account of the worldly pleasures, which they have there enjoyed. This would imply, that they had devoted them to uses foreign from their design; that, instead of meeting in them for the solemn worship of God, they had converted them into edifices of amusement, or of business.

Nor, in fine, do saints cherish a love for houses of publick devotion, because, through the mere force of custom, they have been led to frequent them. They are indeed in the constant habit, unless prevented by absolute necessity, of repairing to the house of God. But this habit is founded both in reason and religion. They have acquired it from the conviction, that the Almighty is to be worshipped, and that he deserves and demands a reasonable service. They have acquired it from a desire of rendering homage to the Most High; and from the delight they take “in the beauties of holiness.”

I. This leads me more particularly to mention, that saints love “ the habitation of God’s house,” because it is dedicated to the service of their almighty father and friend.

Having chosen him for their everlasting portion, it is their earnest desire, that he should be honoured and obeyed. They wish not only to yield him suitable respect and submission themselves; they are anxious, that others also should feel a kindred affection, and pay similar homage. For these and other reasons, they rejoice to see edifices erected for the worship of their gracious sovereign. They are sensible, that, if improved aright, they will be the means of bringing glory to God, and of procuring essential benefits to their fellow men.

Hence they sacredly devote them to the purposes, for which they are intended. They are sorry to see them improved for profane or worldly uses; because they are persuaded, that, in proportion as respect for houses of publick worship is diminished, it will lessen the reverence, which ought ever to be entertained for the omnipresent Jehovah. This will be its effect, in some degree, upon themselves. Much more will it serve to diminish the reverence of those, who are greatly influenced by external appearances, and who cannot easily distinguish between disrespect to the house and disregard to the character of the Almighty.

Besides, there appears a peculiar fitness in thus appropriating to divine service buildings, erected to the Most High. Who would not be struck with the impropriety of meeting in places devoted



to theatrical amusements for the worship of Jehovah? With equal inconsistency do we assemble in houses of publick worship for any other purpose, than to serve God in spirit and in truth.

II. But, secondly, saints feel a regard for these sacred edifices, because they take delight in their publick and solemn exercises.

As they love the Lord their God with all their heart, they rejoice in every opportunity to give evidence of their affection. They are therefore “glad, when it is said unto them, let us go up to the house of the Lord.” They suffer no trivial excuse, such as a slight indisposition, unpleasant weather, much less any worldly pursuits, to debar them from paying “their vows unto God in the presence of his people.”

When in his house, they take a pious satisfaction in its services. On addressing the Most High, they elevate their hearts and affections to him with devout adoration of his perfections, with contrition for their offences, with sincere desires of his pardon and favour, and with grateful acknowledgments of his goodness. When his praises are celebrated in sacred musick, if they have a natural taste for the art, it tends to increase and animate their devotion; if not, they can cordially join in the sentiments expressed. From the explanation and enforcement of divine truth in the discourses of God’s ministers they receive confirmation of their faith, reproof of their sins, and admonitions to duty; they reflect on the improvement they have made of providential dispensations; they compare their conduct with the demands of God’s word; and they form the most

solemn resolutions of future amendment. From the delight they experience in these holy exercises, there is no wonder, that they feel an attachment to the houses, in which they are performed.

III. Saints entertain a regard for places of worship, because they are the instruments of such private and publick good.

They do not esteem them, merely because they are beneficial to themselves. This would evince a narrow regard to self interest, inconsistent with the benevolence of a christian. It is a prominent trait in the character of saints, to rejoice at the good of others. Next to the satisfaction they derive from the temples and sacred institutions of Jehovah themselves, it is their happiness, that others share these benefits.

The advantages resulting to mankind in their *individual* capacity from temples sacred to the Most High influence saints to love “the habitation of God’s house.”

A moment’s consideration will evince, that these advantages are great and numerous. Where shall the sinner be roused from the carnal security, into which he is fallen, but in places, where are denounced the terrours of the divine law? Where shall the impenitent be melted into contrition, if not besought in publick “by the mercies of God” to turn from their evil ways? Where shall the contrite receive hopes of pardon, and mourners find comfort, but in the sympathy of God’s people, and in the services of the sanctuary? Where shall the infidel be impressed, the wavering established, the doubtful confirmed, the inquisitive satisfied, the ignorant

instructed, the backsliding reclaimed, and the pious edified, but in the ministrations of God's house?

Besides these advantages to individuals, the institutions of divine worship produce a salutary influence on *the publick*. They raise the standard of morality. They make religion respected by those, who do not love it. They oblige those, who have the least regard to reputation, to practise their enormities in private. The community is thus in some measure preserved from the contagion of the worst examples. Some check is thus imposed on those, who would otherwise brook no restraint. Even the very laws of society are meliorated; and many are influenced by external restraints to a decency of demeanour, on whom religion has had no sanctifying influence; and thousands are kept back from open and flagrant crimes, who have "no fear of God before their eyes." For these among other important reasons, saints love "the habitation of God's house."

IV. But this devout affection is excited to the highest pitch, when they call to mind the many serious impressions they have there received, the delightful seasons they have there passed, the solemn resolutions they have there formed, and the pious habits they have there had confirmed.

If one place have been the scene of all these happy experiences, if in one temple they have been conducted through the various grades of the christian life, it is not strange, if it become the object of a strong attachment. We always remember with pleasure the very places, where we have experienced signal favours. This attachment to Zion, the city of the



Jewish solemnities, is represented so great, that her “servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof.” Well may such reflections lead the pious to exclaim in the rapturous language of the psalmist, “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Blessed are they, that dwell in thy house. They will be still praising thee.”

This language must appear like the sallies of enthusiasm, or the ravings of a delirium to those, who have no relish for the blessings it celebrates. But no joys can be compared to those, which the pious experience in the exercises of religion. All other delights, though they appear more rapturous and imposing, are flat and insipid, when put in competition with theirs. Yet of these holy pleasures the most satisfactory are those, which they enjoy in the house of God, and in the communion of saints. They have had many delightful seasons in their closets and in their families; but the house of God is the place, where he commonly sees fit to impart his choicest spiritual blessings.

How natural then is it, that saints should retain an ardent affection for the habitation of God's house? How must this affection be increased in proportion to the length of time, in which they have reaped these heavenly benedictions? The sons of riot and of mirth contract a strong affection for their haunts of licentiousness. They improve every opportunity to frequent them; and they never appear happier, than when they meet

their jovial companions, and unite in acts of dissipation. From the same principle, though with very different views and objects, the faithful disciples of Jesus become attached to the sanctuary of the Lord. They omit no favourable occasion to engage in its solemnities; and they experience delights, which those only, who have tasted them, can conceive, in social worship, in acts of communion and fellowship with the father, and with his son Jesus Christ.

I shall now close my discourse with some pertinent remarks and inferences.

1. It is, first, an unfavourable symptom, when people manifest little or no regard for “the habitation of God’s house.” It gives too great reason to suspect, that their affections are otherwise engaged.

Yet what numbers appear to answer this description? How many avail themselves of any excuse, of imaginary indisposition, of worldly affairs, of the company of friends, to absent themselves from publick worship? The neglect of the sanctuary and of the various institutions of religion is evidently a growing, an alarming evil. It infects all classes in society, the high and the low, the rich and the poor. We cannot account for this, but by an indifference to divine things, which portends the most direful consequences. For what principle shall restrain men, who “have not the fear of God before their eyes” from every crime, which they may incline to perpetrate, and which they can commit with impunity? Nothing, but the powerful arm of the magistrate. But, if the depravation become general, legislators themselves will frame “mischief by law,” and will erect no barriers to the most danger-

ous vices. In this case the strong arm of the powerful alone can be adequate to protection. The moral influence of laws will be of no avail, where there is no disposition to observe them. Nor will it answer any purpose for legislators to enact wholesome regulations, unless they themselves observe them, and unless they provide for their execution.

But the most alarming effects of this irreligious spirit extend to a future world. Though persons, who are most interested in this remark, are the least influenced by it ; yet it cannot be supposed, that the Almighty will hold them guiltless, who thus disregard his worship, and neglect to give him the honour, which is his just due. He will not ; for in his word he has threatened severe and aggravated punishment to the finally impenitent.

This increasing disrespect for the house of God must be imputed to “an evil heart of unbelief,” as its true source, to an indisposition for religious services, to an immoderate pursuit of worldly business or amusements. It cannot be expected, that they, who are thus disposed, should feel a sincere affection for the sanctuary, where their sensual and worldly spirit is incessantly condemned, and where they find so little to favour their unholy purposes.

But, it is proper to add, that the most regular observance of publick worship is no certain evidence, that we truly love “the habitation of God’s house.” We may go there through the force of custom, or from unworthy motives too obvious to be mentioned ; and we may possess no more real piety, than they, who wholly neglect “the assembling of themselves together.”



2. If therefore we have been constant at the services of the temple, it becomes us, secondly, to inquire, by what motives we have been influenced.

Has it been through a sincere regard to the glory of God, to worship him “in spirit and in truth,” to “grow in grace,” and thus to make progress in religion? If so, we have been governed by right principles. Our attachment to the house of God has been sincere and praiseworthy; we shall reap much present advantage, and shall enjoy a much more ample recompense “at the resurrection of the just.”

But, if otherwise, if we have no good evidence to believe, that we have frequented the house of worship from pious and good motives, our constant attendance will signify nothing with him, who requires “truth in the inward parts.” There is great danger of resting in the forms of religion, without regard to its vital influence.

3. That love, which we ought ever to feel for “the habitation of God’s house,” should make us shudder at the thought of perverting it to unworthy purposes.

This we do, not only when we attend upon its institutions without right views; but also whenever we manifest any lightness of speech or behaviour amid its solemn services, especially, when we compose ourselves to sleep, and are thus inattentive to the messages of grace addressed unto us. “Holiness becomes God’s house forever;” and, considering the pious objects to which it is devoted, we ought to be exceedingly careful, how we undervalue it in our own view, or do any thing to lessen a reverence for its institutions in the view of others.

4. When we are detained from the house of God by sickness, or are obliged to bid adieu to it by the approach of death, it will afford us sweet satisfaction, if we can reflect, that we “have loved the habitation of God’s house.”

The expression of the psalmist in the text was uttered, when he was driven from the stated worship of the sanctuary ; and it appeared to yield him heartfelt satisfaction, that he had conscientiously improved his past opportunities in the service of his Maker. This doubtless afforded him the greatest consolation he could enjoy amid the calamities of exile and of absence from the place of his affections. On another similar occasion he breaks out into this rapturous language, “A day spent in thy courts is better, than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.” Such supports will be ours, if we can appeal to past improvement of the temple of Jehovah with the same consciousness of rectitude. It is a comfort often greatly needed, to support the mind under dangerous sickness, and especially in the near view of dissolution. At that awful moment, we sometimes hear those, whose consciences have not become completely hardened, lament neglected opportunities of worship, which are forever past. We hear them adopt the spirit of that complaint, “How have we hated instruction, and our hearts despised reproof ; and have not obeyed the voice of our teachers, nor inclined our ears to them, that instructed us !” Would we be preserved from such uncomfortable reflections, we must improve seasons of health and prosperity in



cherishing and manifesting a regard to publick worship.

5. Lastly, when we leave a house of prayer, to assemble in it no more, it becomes us to “remember, how” we have “received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent.”

This, my hearers, is now to be the case with us. We are, this day, to bid adieu to this venerable temple, in which many of us have enjoyed such sweet communion, and to which some of us have become attached by a long period of time.<sup>1</sup> Nearly ninety two years have elapsed, since the corner stone was laid “with the voice of joy and praise” by your devout forefathers. When they were few in number, and moderate in their circumstances, they piously resolved with God’s ancient servant, “Behold, we will build a house to the name of the Lord our God to dedicate it to him.” Recollect, that, but two centuries since, these regions<sup>2</sup> were the abodes of savage barbarity, ignorance, and superstition; and perhaps on the very spot, where we and your fathers have worshipped the only true God, the infernal rites of paganism were then performed. But God be praised, who has preserved us from the service of dumb idols, and inclined us to pay homage to the only proper object of supreme regard. Thanks

<sup>1</sup> Mr. John Goddard, the oldest person present on this occasion, has attended publick worship in this house, most of the time, for 72 years.

<sup>2</sup> On Sewall’s farm in this town are now plainly discernible the remains of an Indian fort, containing about the eighth part of an acre. It is of a square form, surrounded by a ditch nearly three feet deep, and a parapet about three feet high. It has an opening or gateway at each side. One of these is directly toward a large swamp, commonly called Cedar Swamp, near which the fort is situated, on a commanding eminence. Tradition, which has long preserved the memorial of this fort, gives no account, by what tribe of Indians, on what occasion, nor why it was erected.

be to God, for the prosperity, which has attended this house, so that children's children, even to the fifth and sixth generation, have been permitted to worship within these sacred courts.

May we not piously hope, that many sons and daughters have been conducted to immortal glory through the portals of this holy temple? May we not hope, that their "spirits" now "made perfect" are with complacency beholding the proceedings of their children? Let us attentively listen to the advice, which, we may presume, they would give us, were they permitted to burst the veil, which conceals them from our view. 'Children, you have 'done virtuously in erecting a more commodious 'temple to the Lord your God. "O worship the 'Lord in the beauty of holiness. Follow peace 'with all men. Be at peace among yourselves." 'May "the Lord count, when he writeth up the 'people," whom he will forever bless, that thousands were "born" to glory "there." To this 'purpose, may the building, you are about to consecrate to Almighty God, be forever devoted to 'its professed object. Reflect on the manner, in 'which you have improved your many past opportunities, repent of whatever is sinful, reform what 'is erroneous, and prepare to meet us in climes of 'endless bliss.'

And now, thou monument of our fathers' piety, farewell. Farewell, ye ancient pillars, ye venerable walls, and, thou sacred desk, farewell. We will yet endeavour, by "help obtained of God," not wholly to forget the instructions we have here received, the counsels, which have here been given, the warn-

ings, which have here been urged, the threats, which have been here denounced, the promises, which have been here unfolded, and the many precious seasons we have here enjoyed.

“Lord, we *have* loved the habitation of thy house, the place, where thine honour dwelleth.” May we still resolve, on entering yon spacious and elegant temple, that “we will not forsake the house of our God. And may God almighty be with us, as he was with our fathers. May he never leave us, nor forsake us.” AMEN.

A  
SERMON

DELIVERED AT BROOKLINE,

11 JUNE, 1806;

AT THE

DEDICATION  
OF THE NEW MEETING HOUSE.

---

---

BY JOHN PIERCE, A. M.

MINISTER OF BROOKLINE.

---

---

"HOW AMIABLE ARE THY TABERNACLES, O LORD OF HOSTS !

"O WORSHIP THE LORD IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS."

---

---

CAMBRIDGE,

WILLIAM HILLIARD, PRINTER.

.....

1806.



## *Exercises at the Dedication.*

I. An Anthem, " O Lord God of Israel," &c.

II. The Rev. Thomas Gray of Roxbury made the introductory prayer, and read 2 Chron. vi.

III. Psalm xcvi, Belknap's Collection, to the tune of Christmas hymn.

IV. The Rev. John Bradford of Roxbury made the dedicatory prayer.

V. Psalm LXXXIV to Portsmouth.

VI. Sermon.

VII. The Rev. Eliphalet Porter of Roxbury made the concluding prayer.

VIII. Psalm LXV to Old hundred.

IX. The solemnities were closed with " Brown's Dedication Anthem," " Hail glorious day !" &c.



# THE BENEFITS OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.



A

## DEDICATORY SERMON.



EXODUS XX. 24.

*IN ALL PLACES, WHERE I RECORD MY NAME, I WILL COME UNTO THEE, AND I WILL BLESS THEE.*

**T**HIS consolatory promise was addressed by Jehovah to Moses, and through him to the children of Israel, to direct their worship, to revive their hopes, and to animate their obedience. They had just witnessed an awful and majestick spectacle at the foot of Sinai. That sacred mount had been “altogether on a smoke; because the Lord descended upon it in fire.” To increase the terrours of the scene, “there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount; and the whole mount quaked greatly; all the people, that was in the camp, trembled;” and even Moses himself was not exempt from the general consternation.

While their minds were in this tender and susceptible frame, the ten commandments were delivered with solemn majesty through “clouds and thick darkness.”

Having asserted the honour, and enjoined the reverence due unto his name, Jehovah next provides for the permanent influence of these impressions by prescribing altars for his regular worship. He directs them to be made of earth, that they might differ from the altars of the idolatrous Egyptians, and that they might be suddenly and easily erected, during the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness. That they might not despair of propitiating that being, whose terrors had made them afraid, he condescends to assure them, "In all places, where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee."

The blessings, to be derived from places, sacred to the worship of almighty God, are here proclaimed. But, thanks to our heavenly father, these blessings are not now restricted to the altars, nor even to the magnificent temple of the Jews. The period has long since arrived, when neither to the mountain of Samaria, nor yet to Jerusalem is the acceptable worship of Jehovah confined. But, wherever he is "worshipped in spirit and in truth," there he records his name, there he imparts his heavenly benedictions.

Now, though grateful homage may be presented to the Most High in the retirement of the closet, or within the domestick circle, yet numerous and important benefits obviously result from publick worship.

A consideration of these benefits appears naturally suggested by the text and the occasion; and, it is hoped, it will not be deemed unseasonable by an assembly, convened to solemnize, for the first time,

the worship of God almighty in this house of prayer.

I. The publick worship of Jehovah in places, where he records his name, is, in the first place, favourable to devotion.

That devotion, which would be cold and languid in retirement, is enlivened and invigorated in a publick assembly. Its sacred ardour fires the breast of the humble worshipper, and by sympathy its genial influence is extended to others. Thus the devout person mutually receives and imparts fresh vigour in his religious exercises by joining in the devotions of the sanctuary.

It is in this solemn office of piety, as in other concerns, the union of numbers tends to increase the interest and the zeal of each individual. A person may possess an ardent thirst for knowledge ; but his desire and ability to attain it are greatly increased, when associated with others to accomplish the same object. An individual may form a benevolent project ; but he will be more likely to execute it with resolution and effect, if aided by others. On the same grounds our devotional feelings become more intense, in proportion to the number of devout fellow worshippers.

There is in every breast a principle of sympathy, which is called into action by the influence of example. To this principle is it owing, that a whole audience are often suddenly and deeply affected in a similar manner. We insensibly “rejoice with them, who do rejoice, and weep with them, who weep.” As this principle will account for those kindred feelings, which so often pervade a mixed

assembly, so it suggests a valid argument in favour of publick devotion.

It will be said, that many return from the house of God, as they went, without taking the least interest in the prayers, which have been offered. Or, if they have felt a sudden glow of devotion, it proves transient, “as the morning cloud, or the early dew.”

But the abuse of a blessing argues nothing against its utility. If, while others are presenting devout prayers and praises to the Most High, these persons do not catch a portion of their spirit, they do violence to one of the most powerful springs of action in the human breast. For what can be better adapted to inspire with devotion the most hard and insensible heart, than to “go to the house of God with the voice of joy and praise, with the multitude, that keep holy day?” What can be better adapted to this purpose, than the solemn exercises, in which they there engage? What can conduce more to this end, than unitedly to offer adorations, confessions, petitions, and praises before the throne of the Eternal?

We accordingly find, that publick worship is one of the most usual means, which the Deity employs, to strike conviction into the impenitent heart, and to give it a relish for the beauties of holiness. How many devout souls can testify, that in the house of God they received their first impressions of piety; and have thus realized the fulfilment of that gracious promise, “In all places, where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee?”

II. Publick worship is, secondly, beneficial, as it affords the best means of religious instruction.



A great part of mankind are so immersed in the cares, or so devoted to the pleasures of life, that, were it not for frequent and stated periods to recal attention to their Maker, they would be in danger of wholly forgetting him. The leisure they find is not so generally employed in religious inquiries and duties, as their importance demands. Hence the same arguments, which enforce worship of any kind, urge the necessity of publick worship. In its exercises the most interesting concerns of mortals are frequently brought to view. The ignorant are instructed ; the careless awakened ; the unbelieving admonished ; the vicious rebuked ; the impenitent alarmed ; and the pious are confirmed in their most holy faith. Even they, who have made great advances in other branches of knowledge, may hear some things, which deserve attention, from the humblest ministers of Jesus.

To be sensible of the advantages resulting from these publick instructions, we have only to compare the state of morals and piety among christian and pagan nations. The comparison must at once impress us with the value of our religious institutions.

Some degree of this conviction will also be produced by comparing those in christian nations, who regularly attend the publick worship of God, with those, who neglect it. Among the former we may often find persons of ordinary mental powers, who far exceed in religious knowledge and virtuous practice persons of more intelligent minds.

But suppose, there are frequent instances of men, who are wiser, than their teachers ; and who, in the ministrations of the sanctuary, hear no truth, which



they themselves could not better illustrate and defend. Still these cannot justly plead exemption from the necessity of publick worship. For,

III. It is, in the third place, highly beneficial by suggesting incitements to duty.

None are so confirmed in virtue, as not to require frequent recurrence to plain and obvious truths. We oftener fail of performing duty through negligence, than through ignorance. The most important part of ministerial fidelity therefore consists rather in enforcing what is familiar, than in exhibiting what is new.

It is a very common, yet a very erroneous sentiment, that the most essential part of publick worship consists in preaching, where man only is addressed. This is so far from the truth, that it is really no part of worship. It is indeed highly useful in its place, to explain, enforce, and defend religious principles and doctrines. It leads to the consideration of many truths, which we know better, than we observe. If it do not always amuse us by novelty, nor gain admiration by the display of genius, it generally exhibits useful motives to the observance of duty.

But the essence of publick worship is devotion and praise. Of these solemn exercises the Deity is the immediate object. Next to the tendency of sincere prayer to procure the blessings desired, it is beneficial, as a mean of exciting us to duty.

When, for example, we unite in devout adoration of the great first cause, how naturally does it confirm and increase our reverence of his character! When we confess to him our sins, and implore his

forgiveness, we must be mere hypocrites, if we are not thus excited to repent and amend. When we thank him for his numberless and inestimable favours, true gratitude impels us to resemble him more, and to serve him better. When we entreat every needed benediction, it implies, that we strive to have our minds rightly prepared to receive and improve divine benefits. The singing of God's praises has also a happy tendency to excite the pious affections of those, who are "formed for concord of sweet sounds."

IV. In the fourth place, publick worship is highly beneficial from its social effects.

In the house of God the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the pious and the impious, friends and enemies, all join in harmonious worship. Here the poor are taught to feel their consequence, and to act their part, as rational and immortal beings ; and the great ones of the earth are made to realize, that, "though called gods," they are but men. Here the pious learn to exercise pity, instead of indignation, toward the wicked ; and the impious are persuaded "to be followers of them, who are good." They, who cannot speak peaceably with each other in any other situation, and who are always studying mutual insults and injuries, here kneel together before the altar of him, who requires them to be reconciled to each other, that they may acceptably offer their gifts. Here the frequent intercourse of all classes in society tends to restrain the impetuous, and to imbolden the timid ; to encourage the diffident, and to check the presumptuous ; to elevate the humble, and to depress the proud ;

to strengthen friendships, and to heal animosities. In fine, as the roughest substances are made smooth by collision, so this frequent intercourse serves to remove the greatest asperities in human nature.

V. The publick worship of God is therefore of great consequence, regarded merely in the light of a civil institution.

By the sanctions it gives to virtue, it comes in aid of the laws to enforce useful restraints. Nay, by the commanding influence it acquires over the hearts and consciences of men, it extends its salutary effects beyond the cognizance of human legislation. By purifying the fountain of moral action, it helps to render "the issues of life" pure and salutary. It lessens the burden of legislators by inducing men to govern themselves; and it excites them to pay a more circumspect attention to their lives, than could be effected by the most judicious laws, the most wisely administered.

VI. But, sixthly, when viewed, as the medium of securing the approbation, receiving the aid, and enjoying the consequent blessings of Jehovah, publick worship rises into the highest importance.

Such advantages it affords to all sincere worshippers. For Jehovah expressly declares, "In all places, where I record my name, I *will come* unto thee; and I *will bless* thee."

Now these blessings are such, as are bestowed in the present life, or such, as are reserved for the faithful "in the life, which is to come."

Many are the *present* tokens of God's favour, which the pious experience in the religious services of his house. They do not indeed behold the bright



effulgence of the shechinah, which illumined and sanctified the tabernacle of old. This manifestation of divine glory was peculiarly adapted to the rude state of the world, in which the Mosaick economy was instituted, and to that system of religion, which principally consisted in addresses to the senses.

Yet pious worshippers now enjoy that internal evidence of the divine presence and blessing, which convinces them of their reality, and which delights their souls. In solemn addresses to heaven, and in the celebration of the divine praises, their devotional feelings are excited to the highest pitch; and, while their piety is increased, their benevolence is enlarged. Such exquisite delight do they take in the sacred exercises of God's house, and such salutary effects do these services produce on their temper and deportment, that they can ascribe them to nothing short of almighty agency.

But the richest blessings, they there derive, are secured to them in reversion. Here imperfection cleaves to their best services, disappointments abate their purest joys, and anxiety disturbs their sweetest repose. But, encouraged by the benevolence of the Deity, and relying on the promises of his Son, they are persuaded, that, when their "earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, they shall have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." There those doubts, which now and then obscure their brightest prospects, shall be dispelled. There those sorrows, which now follow in rapid succession their happiest moments, shall give place to uninterrupted joys. There that coldness and indifference, which

now adhere to their best services, shall be succeeded by unwearied zeal in ascribing “blessing, and honour, and glory, and power unto him, that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb forever and ever.”

1. From the subject, we, first, infer the eminent blessings, enjoyed by those, who sincerely worship God in his house.

Not that publick worship will invariably produce these happy effects. In itself considered, it is a merely positive institution ; and it can be no otherwise useful, than as it enkindles and advances piety of heart and of life. Men may be constant in the services of the temple, who have no true regard to the being, whose worship they profess to celebrate. But, when the homage, they pay the Most High in his earthly courts, is sincere, it commonly leads to the various offices of the christian character.

How happy then, both for time and eternity, are those privileged saints, whom God meets and blesses in the place, “where his honour dwelleth?” They receive support under the trials, comfort under the afflictions, and hope amid the calamities of this mutable state. Yes, devout and humble soul, thou mayest here endure the greatest personal sufferings ; thou mayest here be exposed to the frowns of heaven ; thou mayest here encounter the scorn, the contempt, the persecutions of the world. But by strength derived from thy God, and from him, “who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself,” thou mayest be amply supported. Thou mayest be enabled triumphantly to exclaim, “Lord whom have I in heaven, but thee? and there is none



upon earth, that I desire, besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth ; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.”

2. We may, secondly, deduce the irrational part they act, who in any way deprive themselves or others of these comforts and these blessings.

Of this description are they, who unnecessarily absent themselves from the publick worship of God. They may not feel their need of the instructions this affords. But we have seen, that other eminent advantages may be derived from this institution, which demand the attention of the most enlightened, the most pious minds. Can any reasonably object to thy service, O God, “ in whom we live, and move, and have our being ?” Can any justly plead exemption from thy worship, before whom “ angels bow, and archangels veil their faces ?” Can any wisely neglect due homage to thee, whom “ the spirits of the just made perfect” continually adore in humble prostrations before thy throne ?

But the evils do not terminate with those, who neglect publick worship. By example they extend their baneful influence to others. Even the lowest menial servant possesses in this respect the power of doing injury. How much greater evils may be produced by those, whose station is more exalted, and whose example more influential ? They, who absent themselves from the house of God, naturally involve others in the same neglect. If rich, they must have their companions and attendants ; if poor, they must have their associates. In proportion therefore, as publick worship is any thing more, than an idle ceremony, are they accountable, who neglect it.

themselves, or who in any way cause others to neglect it.

Great God, do not evils pour in upon us in sufficient abundance, that this must be added to the sum of national degeneracy? Have not enough of our wholesome institutions gone to decay, without exposing our very altars to neglect and contempt? Have we not sufficiently deviated from the spirit of our ancestors, that we must sacrifice one of the strongest pillars of our national fabric, established by their care, fostered by their piety, and handed down to us with their parental benedictions? Forbid it, heaven, that we should be so degenerate! Forbid it, my countrymen, that we should have no greater regard to our civil prosperity! Forbid it, blessed spirit of our ancestors, that we should be so unmindful of thee!

3. As the Almighty graciously vouchsafes such blessings in places, where he records his name, we see the propriety of erecting and dedicating houses of worship to his service.

This, beloved people of my charge, you have with a noble emulation effected.

Though this place was settled within three years of our capital, to which it for several years belonged, yet so slow was its growth, that a century has but just elapsed from its incorporation, as a town. Even then your fathers were so few and so straitened, that, nine years after, they found it a heavy burden to erect yonder humble, yet venerable mansion, in which we have lately shed the parting tear, and to which we have bidden a solemn adieu. We have consigned thee, dear house of our God, to that

destiny, which sooner or later awaits all earthly things. No wonder, that our "fathers and ancient men," who had so long loved that habitation of God's house, "when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes," should entertain melancholy emotions, "while many shouted aloud for joy."

So great was your veneration for that ancient monument of your fathers' piety, that some of you hesitated, before you could consent to its demolition.

But you at length firmly resolved to "dwell no longer in your ceiled houses, and let the Lord's house lie waste." You resolved; and discordant opinions were at once harmonised, and a mutual sacrifice of personal opposition cemented your union.

When you behold the discord and confusion, which so often arise respecting houses of worship, you have great occasion, my friends, to be thankful to him, who has disposed your hearts to peace, who has conducted you with such wonderful unanimity through an undertaking so difficult, so hazardous, and, considering your numbers, so expensive. "Behold, how good, and how pleasant it is to dwell together in unity!" May you never be called more fully to realize this truth by the persecuting effects of a malevolent and party spirit!

Under the fostering care of your provident and faithful committee,<sup>2</sup> by the superintendence and ex-

<sup>1</sup> See Ezra iii. 12, 13.

<sup>2</sup> The committee for conducting the building were

Deacon John Robinson

Col. Isaac S. Gardner, Esq.

Mr. Nathaniel Murdock

Capt. Joseph Goddard

Mr. Ebenezer Heath

Mr. William Ackers

Dr. William Aspinwall, Esq.

Deacon Samuel Clark.

Stephen Sharp, Esq.



ertions of a wise master builder<sup>1</sup> and his assistants, aided by the benefactions of generous and munificent individuals,<sup>2</sup> this beauteous fabrick has risen to your view.

Blessed be God, that in its erection no unlucky accident has stained it with blood. Blessed be God for the success, which has attended it through its various stages. May "the glory of this latter house be even greater, than the glory of the former," by the multitudes, who shall here flock unto Christ, "as doves to their windows." To this purpose resolve, that you will convert it to no unworthy use, that you will seriously attend on its regular ministrations, that you will render its beauty and order venerable in the eyes of beholders. O "forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is ;" nor thus deprive yourselves and others of the precious benefits, which publick worship is adapted to afford.

As a motive for religious gratitude to the God of your fathers, compare the house, in which we are now assembled, in point of size, elegance, symmetry, and costliness with that, to which we have late-

The three first did the principal part of the business. The six last were, with equal powers, a committee for consultation.

1 Mr. Peter Banner, a native of England, whose ingenuity and fidelity gave great and universal satisfaction.

2 The Hon. Stephen Higginson, Esq. gave the bell, manufactured in London, and weighing 1000 pounds.

Mr. Stephen Higginson, jun. gave the southern cherry wood for the pulpit, and the caps of the pews.

Mr. John Lucas gave 400 dollars, out of which was purchased a clock.

Richard Sullivan, Esq. gave 150 dollars toward the stepping stones.

Mr. David Hyslop gave the baptismal bason, valued at 47 dollars.

Mr. Thomas Walley of Boston gave an elegant church Bible in folio, valued at 36 dollars.



ly bidden adieu ; and let the reflection enkindle your pious thankfulness to him, who has thus made you to differ, who has thus abundantly blessed you with worldly prosperity.' "Beloved, I wish above all things, that your souls may also prosper, and be in health."

It has been usual, on occasions like the present, to enliven the publick discourses with a detail of historical events relating to the church and people. But, as this was done, at the late completion of our century, as an incorporated town, it will not be expected, that I should now retrace the steps, which have been so recently taken.

By solemn prayer and praise we now dedicate this temple to the service of him, who can make it the instrument of essential benefit to ourselves, and even to our children's children. "This is the day," which we have anxiously desired. "We will rejoice, and be glad in it. Save now, we beseech thee, O Lord ; O Lord, we beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed may he ever be, that cometh in the name of the Lord. We have blessed you out of the house of the Lord." AMEN.

1 The whole cost of the house was 18083 dollars. This with other contingent expenses, amounting altogether to 20193 dollars, was apportioned on the pews. The pews were then sold at auction, there being, exclusively of the one for the ministers' use, 87 pews. The highest sum, which was given for a choice, was 210 dollars, making the pew amount to 525 dollars. Four pews were sold for 500 dollars and upwards apiece. Thirteen pews were sold for above 400 dollars each. No pew below was prized at less, than 160 dollars ; and no pew in the gallery under 110 dollars. The amount of two of these pews is doubtless more, than was expended, a century ago, in building the old meeting house !

